

# African Burial Ground News

*Learn from the past  
to prepare for the future.*

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## Celebration of Ancestral Heritage Weekend

### Focus on “Meditations on Compassion and Healing”

**S**piritual words, music and dance tributes invoked a spirit of connection among all those who attended the 2005 *Africans in the Americas: Celebration of Ancestral Heritage Weekend*. This was the second annual celebration following the 2003 reinterment ceremony on the African Burial Ground memorial site. Two years ago in October, the ancestral remains of 419 men, women and children of African descent were returned to the sacred landmark site and reburied nearly a decade after they were rediscovered between 1991 and 1992. This year, the living presence of the African Burial Ground site was experienced in the preparations for construction of the exterior memorial to commemorate the upwards of 20,000 people of African descent buried there during the 17th and 18th centuries. Under the theme “Meditations on Compassion and Healing,” expressions of concern encompassed those enduring the tremendous pain of loss and separation due to Hurricane Katrina on the Gulf Coast, famine in Niger, and suffering in Haiti. More than 4,000 people participated in the weekend activities, including actor Wesley Snipes with his family and Consul Generals Julia Machado

*Continued on page 2*



School children with handmade signs take part in the Youth Ring Shout.



Frederick Douglas Academy II students join Peggy King Jorde, former African Burial Ground Project Executive (left), Stephen Perry, U.S. General Services Administrator (center) and Donald Murphy, National Park Service Deputy Director (right) for the ceremonial groundbreaking.

## Ceremonial Groundbreaking for Exterior Memorial and Release of National Park Service Draft Management Report

**O**n Wednesday, September 28, the ceremonial groundbreaking for the African Burial Ground exterior memorial took place along with the release of the National Park Service's "Draft Management Recommendations for the African Burial Ground." Stephen A. Perry, Administrator, United States General Services Administration (GSA); Eileen Long-Chelales, GSA Regional Administrator; and Donald W. Murphy, Deputy Director, National Park Service (NPS); Howard Dodson, Schomburg Center Director and Rodney Léon, AARRIS architect and memorial design winner, expressed gratitude for the dedicated efforts of elected officials and members of the descendant community. Ac-

knowledge as well was the work of Howard University, the Department of the Interior, and the Army Corps of Engineers to move the project forward. Students from the Frederick Douglas Academy II in Harlem played an integral role in this ceremony by joining with other program participants to outline the area for the libation chamber with Sankofa flags. The exterior memorial has a scheduled completion date of October 2006.

Mr. Perry noted, "We can look to the future with optimism and with excitement about the fact that this site will serve as an appropriate memorial consistent with the level of honor and respect that we should pay to the indi-

*Continued on page 3*

# "Remembering Our Torch Bearers"

By Donna J. Harden-Cole

Sparkling the torch that ignited the modern Civil Rights Movement in 1955, Mrs. Rosa Parks at the age of forty-two defied the prevailing segregation laws of the 'Jim Crow' South by refusing to give up her seat to a white male passenger on a public bus in Montgomery, Alabama. The passing of Mrs. Parks, at age 92, on October 24, 2005 caused great reflection on the impact of her defiance. Her actions called for a re-examination of the legal and political system of segregation within our nation and began a dialog about societal iniquities based on myopic but enforceable federal laws.

Mrs. Parks' action in the South had an

earlier northern counterpart in Ms. Elizabeth Jennings. In New York City, twenty-four year old Jennings' experience with segregation in 1854, nearly 100 years earlier, also catalyzed community activism for change. Literally thrown from a segregated streetcar after a dispute with the conductor, Ms. Jennings, a schoolteacher and church organist, inspired protest among community members and some of the most prominent civil rights activists of her day. Among them, her own father, Mr. Thomas L. Jennings, a renowned tailor, credited as being



one of the founders of The Abyssinian Baptist Church, which is now located in Harlem. Like Mrs. Parks' action in Montgomery, Ms. Jennings' protest led to the ban on segregation on New York City streetcars.

The prominence of these two individuals underscores the African American legacy of community activism and commitment for social justice. Community activism

was replicated during the many protests and vigils led by longtime activists surrounding the 1991-92 excavation of New York City's African Burial Ground. It is the voices of concerned citizens like Elizabeth Jennings and Rosa Parks that inspire others to carry the torch.

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## *CELEBRATION, Continued from page 1*

of Angola and Fikile Magubane of South Africa.

Two thousand schoolchildren with healthy lungs and hearts set the spirit of celebration in motion at the start of the three-day program on Friday, September 30 by joining their hands around the perimeter of the landmark African Burial Ground in a "Youth Ring Shout." At the start of the event, these school children from various neighborhoods in New York City assembled together on Chambers Street to receive inspirational messages from recording artist MC Lyte, Deirdre Hollman, Associate Director of the Junior Scholars Program at the Schomburg Center and Howard Dodson, Director of the Schomburg Center.

Then, accompanied by drummers, the children proceeded to walk along the five perimeter streets of the seven-acre landmark site where historical street banners hung from lampposts—Chambers Street on its southern side, Broadway on its western side, Centre and Lafayette Streets on its eastern side and, Duane Street on its northern side—until the circle around the cemetery was complete. The spirit of the "Youth Ring Shout" carried over into performances by the Women of the Calabash and the cast of the South African musical, *Drumstruck*.

Everyone present witnessed the signs of gratitude that the school children created for the ancestors with words such as "Thank You for Everything," and could hear their joyful shouts including "We love our ancestors!" These sights and sounds echoed the historical

ring shout, a dance of praise rooted in the Americas with African origins that, later, gave rise to musical forms such as gospel and jazz. The children also wore red, black and green bracelets imprinted with the Sankofa symbol and "NY African Burial Ground Project." As the final salute, they wrote heartfelt messages to the ancestors on cards and placed them inside of two hand carved coffins, which will be buried under the soon-to-come permanent memorial designed by Rodney Léon.

The program continued with an ecumenical consecration/ affirmation ceremony, that

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## **Two thousand school-children with healthy lungs and hearts set the spirit of celebration in motion**

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started with a libation, to prepare for the permanent memorial. Ecumenical prayers were offered by Rev. Gregory Robeson Smith of the historic Mother A.M.E. Zion Church; Canon Frederick B. Williams, Church of the Intercession; Dr. James Forbes, Riverside Church; Rev. Darren Mitchell, First A.M.E. Zion Church; Rev. Darnell Montgomery, Metropolitan A.M.E. Church; and Rev. Renee Washington, Memorial Baptist Church. Cultural and spiritual threads could be felt, as well, in the performances given by the McCullough Invaders brass band and violinist and Hurricane Katrina survivor, Tadia Lynch. Speakers included New York State Regents

Vice Chancellor Adelaide L. Sanford, Schomburg Director Howard Dodson, memorial designer Rodney Léon and New York City Councilman Bill Perkins. Another highlight was the unveiling of the "African Burial Ground Way" street sign under the direction of Councilmen Perkins and Robert Jackson. Continuing the celebration into the night, Rev. Gerald Beckles led a vigil that included performances by drummer Louis Hayes with the Cannonball Adderley Legacy Band, and spoken word tributes by Russell Simmons Def Poets Black Ice and Kayo, along with open mic presentations.

On Saturday, October 1, Rev. Herbert Daughtry, House of the Lord Pentecostal Church, led off the ecumenical prayers. Blessings continued from Kevin Tarrant of the Hopi and Winnebago Tribes; and the Native American ensemble, the Silver Clouds. Following the spiritual leaders were performances by artists representing countries in Africa and the African Diaspora including singers, Kaissa, from Cameroon and Ileana Santamaria (Cuban descent); along with The Eleanor Roosevelt Intermediate School Concert Choir, the African Burial Ground Tribute Choir, the Garifuna Dance Company; Adada-Capoeira; and Brooklyn's Musart Steel Drum Band.

On the final day, Sunday, October 2, the African Burial Ground Memorial Site was open for visitation and a tribute concert, "The Spiritual: An Underground Railroad" featuring bass vocalist Kevin Maynor was held at the Schomburg Center.

# Coming Events

NEW YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
170 Central Park West at 77th Street

Through March 5, 2006

## *Slavery in New York*

Exhibition with lectures, daily readings of slave narratives, and gospel and spiritual music programs. Inspired in part by the discovery of New York City's African Burial Ground, this exhibition reveals the rich cultural legacy produced by enslaved Africans and honors New Yorkers who fought to abolish slavery. For exhibition and complete program information visit: [www.nyhistory.org](http://www.nyhistory.org)

An Excerpt from the Opening Exhibition Lecture given at the New York Historical Society on October 18, 2005 "Slavery in the Americas, Slavery in New York," by Howard Dodson

*Between 1492 and 1776 or roughly the first 300 years of the so-called European colonization of the Americas, 6.5 million people crossed the Atlantic Ocean and settled in the Americas- North, Central, South America and the Caribbean. Of those initial 6.5 million pioneering settlers of the Americas, only 1 million were Europeans. The other 5.5 million were Africans- enslaved peoples from West and Central Africa- who had been captured and enslaved on the African continent, survived the middle passage voyage across the Atlantic and sold again into slavery throughout the hemisphere. Every colonial society in the Americas was populated largely by these people of African descent. And while they constituted the majority of the colonial population in Central and South America and the Caribbean, they were the majority of the population in one of the original British colonies of North America- South Carolina. Nevertheless, in places like Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina and New York, where they were not majorities, their impact on the formative stages of the development of these colonies was definitive.*

*The following exhibition programs are being presented by the New York Historical Society in collaboration with the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.*

Thursday, January 19, 6:30 p.m.

## *The Enduring Legacy of Slavery*

Panel: David W. Blight, Richard F. America, Mary Frances Berry, John McWhorter and Charles Ogletree  
Co-sponsored by the New York County Lawyers' Association

Tuesday, February 7, 6:30 p.m.

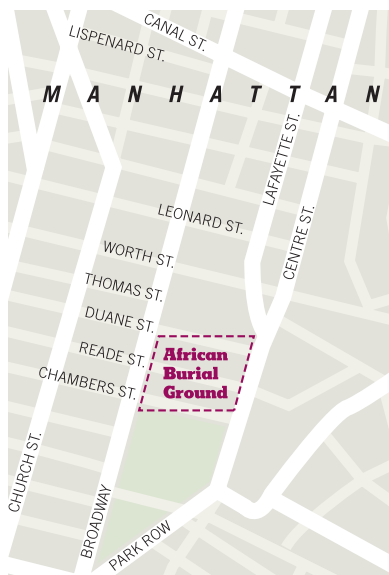
## *The African Burial Ground:*

### *Studying the Early African Americans in New York*

Panel: Howard Dodson, Michael Blakey and Jean Howson

## Historical & Cultural Connections

Stay tuned for more information on these and other Lower Manhattan streets in upcoming newsletters.



## *Groundbreaking, Continued from page 1*

viduals who are resting here. It will not only be an inspiration to people in New York, but it will be an inspiration to people throughout this country and indeed to people throughout the world." He also presented certificates to Herb Bennett, Steven Campbell, Dowoti Desir, Gene Norman and Grace Stanislaus of the Stanislaus of the African Burial Ground Memorial Advisors in recognition of their service. Mr. Murphy added the strongly optimistic words, "I am confident, extremely confident, that this site will become a national historic monument and it will be managed by the National Park Service for posterity, for this and future generations."

The NPS "Draft Management Report" came out of a technical assistance project requested by the General Services Administration to determine how the African Burial Ground should be managed and interpreted in the future. It offers four management alternatives and a brief history of the project, as well as a suggested mission statement, goals, themes and interpretive scenarios for the African Burial Ground.

## *African Burial Ground News*

This special edition newsletter is produced for the African Burial Ground Project by the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. Inquiries about the Project can be sent to:

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## The Office of Public Education and Interpretation Welcomes Volunteers

Volunteer help is needed for information desk, office and event assistance.

Please call 212-637-2019 with your interest.



# UPDATE

## **National Park Service (NPS)**

The National Park Service released a draft management report on September 28, 2005 which summarized the mission of the NY African Burial Ground and gave four alternatives for its future management. Public commentary was sought in late October during two open house events. The first was held on October 22nd at the Brooklyn Public Library and the second on October 24th at the Schomburg Center.

The commentary period on the NPS draft report ended on November 5. NPS staff are now working on the analysis of those comments. Shortly after the Ancestral Heritage commemoration weekend, President George Bush sent a memorandum to Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton requesting that she provide an assessment of the historic and scientific significance of the African Burial Ground. This assessment will include whether it may warrant permanent Federal protection through designation as a National Monument. Mayor Michael Bloomberg has sent a letter confirming the city's endorsement of the designation.

## **Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture**

U.S. GSA Administrator Stephen Perry announced on September 28 that the Army Corps is currently working with the Schomburg Center, which has been designated as the repository for the archives of the African Burial Ground Project. The Center is also managing the educational and public outreach programs for the Project during this transition period and until a determination is made regarding the future management of the African Burial Ground.

## **Office of Public Education and Interpretation (OPEI)**

The OPEI is continuing to provide educational services that are free of charge for the African Burial Ground Project, including responding to information inquiries and giving tours of the memorial site and the commemorative artwork.

The staff working with the Schomburg Center who are based on-site at the OPEI office in 290 Broadway are Donna Harden-Cole, Office Administrator and Public Education Consultant, Monique Singletary, Education Specialist and Editor, and Cheserie Emanuel, Clerical Assistant. They can be reached at (212) 637-2019.



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[www.africanburialground.gov](http://www.africanburialground.gov)